

POINT OF VIEW

Monica Kulkarni '21 Intellectual Property and Entrepreneurship Clinic



As with all other aspects of life last year, the world economy was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses, small and large, experienced disruptions to their operations, in turn causing many to close their doors permanently. However, the Intellectual Property and Entrepreneurship Clinic at Maryland Carey Law offered a sliver of hope for many up-and-coming local businesses and creatives, providing cost-free services to help file trademarks and patents, draft non-disclosure agreements, and form business entities. Though clinic this past year was virtual, it was still the highlight of my law school career.

Our work begins with perhaps my favorite part about the clinic: Friday client-intake meetings. Hearing the stories of musicians, software creators, beverage producers, restaurant, brewery, and non-profit owners, and their visions for their businesses, was inspiring. Asking them questions not only about the legal issues they present but also about their lives, albeit through a computer screen, made the meetings personal and fun. From “Can you tell us about who owns the artwork in your logo?” to “I would love to hear some of your music, what’s your Instagram handle?,” each response from the client gave me a glimpse into their story. For many of the clients that I thought had the most interesting stories or businesses, I eagerly volunteered to be their student-attorney.

Once Professor [Julie] Hopkins '04 and Professor

[Edward] Yee '97 officially retained the client with the clinic, I managed the deadlines and tasks necessary to meet my client’s needs. Researching copyright issues, conducting trademark clearance searches, explaining to the client the risk involved with filing a trademark, drafting client memos, and filing trademark applications with the USPTO became second nature to me, even in just a few months of being in the clinic. The most rewarding part of it all was not only the practical knowledge I gained from working with my clients, but also knowing that I was playing a small part in helping them protect their brands and inventions.

Entrepreneurs and creatives take a gamble on the success of their endeavors, and I felt honored to work with local businesses in achieving their dreams. The clinic injected (pun intended) a sense of hope in me during an otherwise tough time clouded by uncertainty with how the world would recover from the pandemic. Now that cities are reopening, I am excited to patronize some of my clients’ establishments. Going forward, I know I will be a better advocate for my clients because of my experience in the clinic, and for that I am immensely grateful. ■

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